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Forage News [2020-11]

Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, University of Kentucky

UK Forage News

Keeping Forage-Livestock Producers in Kentucky Informed

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Deadline Approaching for NRCS EQIP Assistance

The first FY 2021 EQIP application batching (cut-off) period for Kentucky will be **November 20, 2020.** All eligible applications received by this date will be evaluated and considered for FY 2021 funding. Applications received after that date will be held for the next funding opportunity. Visit https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ky/programs/financial/eqip/ for more information

USDA Hay Markets—October 27, 2020

Below are examples of alfalfa and grass prices being paid FOB barn/stack (except for those noted as delivered, which is indicated by a "d" in the table below) for selected states at the end of the day on Friday, October 23. Also check the USDA Hay Market Prices for additional locations and more detailed information.

Alfalfa hay prices reported to USDA from selected states.

Location	Forage Quality Grade		
	Premium+	Good	Fair
	$ per ton		
California	185-275(d)	120-190	80-140
Colorado	175(d)-220	N/A	N/A
Idaho	180	135	N/A
Iowa	115-320(d)	125-155	120-122
Kansas	153-230	110-165	80-125
Minnesota	135-200	125-185	105-140
Missouri	160-250	120-160	100-125
Montana	180	130	110
Nebraska	175-200	95-160	N/A
New Mexico	230(d)-240(d)	N/A	N/A
Oklahoma	150-180	150	N/A
Oregon	180-250	N/A	N/A
Pennsylvania	245-440	260-330	N/A
South Dakota	225-250	150-200	105-120
Texas	225(d)-300	180(d)-210(d)	N/A
Washington	170-240	165	150
Wisconsin	N/A	145-195	105
Wyoming	210-220	N/A	N/A

Grass hay prices reported to USDA from selected states.

Location	Forage Quality Grade		
	Premium	Good	Fair
	$ per ton		
Alabama	100-300	70	N/A
California	250-300	N/A	N/A
Colorado	N/A	180	N/A
Idaho	N/A	N/A	N/A
Iowa	130(d)-255(d)	120-160	93-115
Kansas	120-140	60-120	50-70
Minnesota	75-260	80-150	65-120
Missouri	120	80	60
Montana	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nebraska	160	85-100	78-85
Oregon	180-336	130	N/A
Pennsylvania	240-405	175-290	125-200
South Dakota	105	90-100	N/A
Texas	140(d)-330	120-260	100-165
Washington	240	N/A	N/A
Wisconsin	N/A	100-120	N/A
Wyoming	210-300	N/A	N/A

Alfalfa Consolidation Rules of the Day

The alfalfa seed industry has gone through a massive makeover in the past 20 years. There are significantly fewer seed marketers and breeding programs, precious few university testing trials. This consolidation provides both positives and negatives for the alfalfa producer. The remaining breeding programs are all first-class entities with highly skilled individuals making cultivar selections. They wouldn't have survived otherwise.

On a negative note, there is less competition and brand choices for the farmer. Many brands have simply fallen along the proverbial roadside.

The greatest challenge in the variety selection game is that university performance trials have become few and far between. There was a day when many universities were testing 30 to 40 varieties per year, but those days are gone. This has occurred for several reasons:

- Program managers either left or retired, and their positions weren't filled.
- Companies preferred not to enter their varieties.
- The expense of running or entering trials was too great given economic constraints.

The result of fewer third-party testing programs is that producers must now find out in real time if a variety is a top performer or not, at least relative to other brand options. This situation is likely not to change.

Even with significant industry consolidation and fewer variety trials, there is still money to be made by devoting

some time to alfalfa variety selection. There remain some foundational selection concepts that are as true today as they have ever been. In fact, there may be more. Here's my list:

1) Get data if you can, but that's becoming more difficult with fewer university trials and very little on-farm testing.
2) Don't select based only on one trait. This is always a recipe for disaster and is akin to picking your spouse based solely on hair color.
3) Consider fall dormancy. Fall dormancy rating is still an important consideration for both yield and forage quality. The trend is toward higher fall dormancy ratings with fast regrowth potential and exceptional winter survival.
4) Yield still matters. Forage yield remains the key factor to a profitable alfalfa enterprise. A modest 1/4 ton (dry matter) per acre yield advantage equates in value to 13 to 17 bushels per acre of corn.
5) Seed cost is easy to recover with enhanced performance. Unlike an annual crop such as corn, added alfalfa seed cost doesn't have to be recovered in one year. The real "cost" of seed is not reflected in the purchase price alone.

Seeding an inferior-yielding variety, regardless of price, means that long-term costs of production are higher per ton of forage produced. Generally speaking, advanced genetics and performance are going to cost more money. Conversely, cost is always a consideration when choosing between comparable varieties. ~ Mike Rankin, Hay and Forage Grower, Oct. 2020.

Sericea – The No-Respect Legume

Sericea lespedeza is a legume that does not get any respect. It can be an invasive, woody and completely useless plant that livestock refuse to eat. While, I agree that a lot of sericea's negative reputation is duly earned, I have recently had a change of heart. Hear me out, I have not lost my mind. What follows are six reasons why sericea might deserve a little more respect.

1. Sericea is a perennial taprooted legume that grows well in the middle of the summer. That puts it in a pretty exclusive club.
2. Sericea can persist on acidic, low fertility sites. Sericea is commonly grown on reclaimed mine sites where the soil is extremely acidic, infertile and very droughty. It can be seen growing on gravelly road cuts and other similar areas across Kentucky. It is a very tough plant.
3. There are improved varieties of sericea (like AU-Lotan, Serala and AU-Grazer) that have been selected for lower tannin and finer stems which can support good cattle gains. In a comparison of 37 multi-year grazing studies in Alabama, pure stands of sericea lespedeza were three of the top ten forages for lowest pasture cost per pound of gain. These studies were with Serala and AU-Lotan.
4. The process of field curing of sericea greatly drops the tannin content. Cattle which will avoid sericea pasture will readily consume the same forage cured for hay.
5. Sericea cures quickly and can make good hay. Sometimes called the poor man's alfalfa, sericea hay is palatable to livestock because the tannin levels decline significantly during field curing. After reading number 6 below, you can see where you might have a ready market for this hay with sheep and goat producers.
6. If you raise sheep or goats, you may already know about the super power of sericea lespedeza. All forms of sericea, from hay, pelleted formulations, silage and pasture have a de-worming effect when fed to small ruminants. Managing internal parasites with small ruminants is difficult because they can graze very close to ground and they can develop resistance to the few de-worming products labeled for small ruminants. The erect growth habit of sericea is also beneficial in managing internal parasites because fewer parasitic stomach worm larvae will crawl up into the elevated grazing zone of sheep and goats.

Sericea lespedeza is not about to knock clover or alfalfa off the gold medal podium when it comes to Kentucky's most valuable legume. But now you know why it may walk with more of a swagger.

Forage Timely Tips: October

- ✓ Using a plate meter or grazing stick, estimate stockpile available for winter grazing.
- ✓ Adjust animal numbers or purchase additional hay to balance forage-feed supply to livestock needs.
- ✓ Graze crop residues and cover crops that will not overwinter. Be careful to avoid fields that contain johnsongrass.
- ✓ Graze winter annuals that will not overwinter such as brassics and oats.
- ✓ Graze other winter annuals once they are 6-8 inches tall and are well anchored. Do NOT graze closer to 4 inches.
- ✓ Sugar content will rise in tall fescue with the cool temperatures and short days of fall. Alkaloid content of tall fescue can also be high in come years, but will begin decline after a hard freeze.
- ✓ Talk with local conservationist about developing a grazing plan and cost-share opportunities.

Pub of the Month: Cyanide Poisoning in Ruminants (ID-220)

Prussic acid, cyanide, or hydrocyanic acid are all terms relating to the same toxic substance. Hydrogen cyanide was first isolated from a blue dye (Prussian blue) and because of its acidic nature it became known by the common name "prussic acid." Cyanide is one of the most rapidly acting toxins that affect cattle. Download the full publication at forages.ca.uky.edu/foragepublications. Contact your local county agent for more info and for testing options.

Upcoming Events (see website for details)

JAN 3-6—AFGC Conference, Savannah, GA
JAN 11-12—AFGC Conference, Virtual
JAN 26—Pastures Please! Horse Meeting, Lexington, KY
FEB 23-25—Novel Tall Fescue Renovation Workshop, Virtual
FEB 25—Alfalfa and Stored Forages Conference, Bowling Green, KY
MAR 25—Novel Tall Fescue Renovation Workshop, Lexington, KY

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